The Politics of Orientalism and Self-Orientalism in a South-South Dialogue: Revisiting Hispanic Orientalism from Said to Sarduy

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Orientalism Revisited

Over three decades have passed since Edward Said published *Orientalism*, where he unpacks the Orient as "almost" a place of European invention. In this polemical rewriting of the grand narrative of the East, the Orient becomes a site ironically inhabited by the dominant West's most persuasive yet passive cultural contestants. To legitimize and sharpen a postcolonial debate on Orientalism, Said proposes several definitions that nostalgically resonate with geographic, political and cultural import: 1) a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience; 2) a term for a field of study: anyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient is an Orientalist, and what he or she does is Orientalism; 3) a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between "the Orient" and "the Occident" and 4) a Western style of dominating, restructuring, and exerting authority over the Orient.[1] While he argues for the interdependence of these classifications, Said purposefully elides the more mundane or academic categories in favor of the last entry, privileging the methodology of power by framing the debate around an aggressive agency poised to manage and produce the Other.

Previous studies on Said's *Orientalism* have focused on power inequalities of the West/East dichotomy (civilized/barbaric, natural/aberrant, rational/despotic), producing narratives of progress in the West that emphazise the value of the individual and Western-style democracy over a seemingly irrational, communal, and aberrant East. Through the lens of Foucault's

1 These definitions from the "Introduction" of *Orientalism* (Said 1979: 1-3), must be read in light of Said's curious warning: "It will be clear to the reader (and will become clearer still throughout the many pages that follow) that by Orientalism I mean several things, all of them, in my opinion, interdependent" (Said 1979: 2).

archaeology of knowledge, scholars of Orientalism choose Said's analysis for its discursive power to dominate, judge, manage, and speak for the East, overpowering the colonized Other through an application of uncritical and unchallenged generalizations. Here Said chooses to walk a middle road between philologist and polemicist, but we have permitted him to do so and frame or self-select the weapons of debate on Orientalism by silencing countervailing arguments, even when some of the most thoughtful misgivings expressed may be his own. Said supplies Orientalists with a greater political role than anticipated as "imperial agents," while ironically silencing all others who are not "servants" of his vision. But to his credit, by politicizing an "antiquated" field of study of diminishing multicultural interest, Said's interdisciplinary critique has fiercely re-energized a discipline, political culture, and way of looking at the world *vis-à-vis* the Other. *Orientalism*'s debate stimulates innovative reflection on the nature of prejudice, hatred, and fear.

I will not rehearse here decades of analysis critiquing Said's structuring of the argument of *Orientalism* as a more sophisticated lens on liberalism and Western power run amok. Given *Orientalism*'s decisive impact, Said's polemic seems to satisfy endless conspiracy theories while centering surreptitiously on the field's exoticizing gaze. Many critics derive inspiration from Said. Bryan Turner, for example, recognizes that Said's classical approach to Orientalism has shaped the way people conceive "Otherness" after debating it in feminist, black and postmodernist studies (1994: 4). Others do not question the historical framing of *Orientalism* as contemporary with Imperialism and the European Enlightenment (Asad 1980, Dalby 1980, Kabbani 1986). And even when critics disagree with Said's premise of a collusion of knowledge and power from an intellectual, nationalist agenda, they conclude that Orientalism without historical ties to colonialism is a "headless beast" (Breckenridge/van der Veer 1993), one incapable of teasing out Orientalist theory from imperial practice. I have been arguing since my early publications in the 1990s and have been joined by others (Ahmad 1992, Warraq 2007, Varisco 2007), even if from different angles, in proposing that it is time to abandon generalizations and the counter-knowledge of Orientalism set against European knowledge. That is, the power of the "antihuman" West to dominate and produce the East is a shallow, probably exhausted metaphor, because, in fact, it offers no contestatory space for reflection, and civilizations do not grow and thrive in a vacuum. It is crucial that we find deeper, alternative

and more productive ways to engage the Other that stress the interconnectedness and interdependence of cultures, politics, histories and values in a viable web of relations.

My theory on the evocative, popular and self-referential *Orientalism* is that, in true humanist and liberal arts fashion, Said is capable of taking truly complex theory (Derrida's redoubling of the almost already, Lacan's inmixing of Otherness, and Foucault's archaeology of human sciences) and synthesizing it, rendering it accessible to a general public through everyday metaphors. He succeeds in reaching a general readership, one far beyond his humanistic training, a public by now enticed by political and cultural payoffs to apply his sweeping theory to a host of genres and media across the board (to all those eroticized, racialized, sexualized, and politicized Others) without distinction. But to move from and beyond binary oppositions to the openness of an East-West-South-South dialog, much analysis points toward a more nuanced, multivocal, internally complex, and less pejorative and difference-driven formulation (Lowe 1991, Kushigian 1991, Lewis 1996). Significantly, Lowe, Lewis and Peirce (1993)[2] transform the debate by rendering visible a female gaze that critiques a univocal, male-centered theory of Orientalism. In the process, they cross borders to present female access to social, cultural and economic power and concentrate on the form and location of the artwork, writing, or presentation as layers of inherently complex, cultural productions.

Hispanic Orientalism and Cultural Crisis

To elide the examples of the Spanish-speaking world is generally to ignore Hispanic Orientalism's potential strategic advantage of having reflected on the spiritual and human knowledge of the Other for more than a millennium. Regrettably, it also signals a loss of 1) the discursive power of openendedness, wherein East and West are in a constant state of contact, flux and renovation; 2) its polyglot nature, that breaks down linguistic barriers through cultural consciousness; and 3) its persistent dialog with the Other and interanimation of images that celebrate difference (Kushigian 1991: 13-16). Hispanic Orientalism is an alternative reading that

2 That is, from the private yet civically regulated space of the imperial harem.

engages the Other from within its psychic and geographic borders. If we were to reinscribe the Orientalist debate within those momentous phases of social and historical import provoked by 'cultural crisis', a deeper discourse would emerge. Through a teasing out and reconfiguring of Orientalist periods of invasion and empire-building, ethnic or racial cleansing, gender battles between social and biological rival contexts, religious wars and philosophical ruptures, alternative narrative voices that disassociate patriarchal discourse from productive cultural clashes could emerge.

The crux of the problem for Orientalism, as I understand it, requires imagining a liberating strategy and carving out a contestatory space from which to explore the complexity of the relationship while annulling collusions of knowledge and power. Unlike feminism, which challenges cultural patriarchy and its repressive conceptual framework from within, Said's figure of Western exploitation has yet to 'imagine' a similar contestatory space to challenge oppression, because the effort would contradict or diminish his thesis and his conceptualization of exile. As Prakash signals, Said poses the problem of the relationship between representation and its objects, but does not offer theoretical space for the relationship or probe the actual production of its subjectivities (Prakash 1995: 211). Hence, there is no thought to the space, form, specificity, or life of the Other's critical responses. In fact, as Ahmad theorizes, the debate seems to be taking place in a void, isolated from the Other's reactions, while wholly contingent upon their erasure and transparency (Ahmad 1992: 172).

It is my contention that a deeper reading, one that is predicated on the interconnectedness of the conceptual frameworks of cultural institutions during periods of 'cultural crisis', will yield an understanding of how people negotiate their place/space as part of something larger. For example, early stages of invasion in Medieval Spain afford some of the earliest Western examples of competition and coexistence with the Other, as language barriers, market policies, and religious and social rites of construction, bathing, working, eating, drinking, sexual relations and marriage are all negotiated (Alfonso X, el Sabio 1922; Castro 1948; Menocal 2002). Across the ocean and centuries later, cultural, philosophical, and gender differences will fuse gestures of authoritarianism to social hierarchies in failed colonial 'whitening' experiments in the colonies of New Spain (particularly Mexico and Cuba) in the New World. These cultural clashes offer multivocal, multicultural, alternative readings of the Other. Simply put, and for the sake of comparison, I contend that Said's Orientalism is predi-

cated on self-referentiality, fixed and closed images, superiority, intellectual smugness, and distance. In contrast, my theory of Hispanic Orientalism stresses those hitches, hesitations, uncertainties, doubts, and ambivalences that collapse distance and stimulate creative movement through open intellectual contact between and among traditions.

From my perspective, Hispanic Orientalism is a cultural gain because it is the platform from which to debate, discard, accept or defeat truth and human knowledge through the logic of everyday social and linguistic practices. These practices are formulas for showing respect for rival thought processes and tolerance for dissenting opinions with merit. Consequently, confrontations, hesitations, and doubts are couched in public, social terms of conference and debate. Given this framework, values of respect and tolerance are embedded in multicultural social practices, encouraging rival political alliances and cultural traditions to strategically, over time, alter and redefine fundamental agreements to secure their future.

The Imagining of Self-Orientalism

As a field and strategy, self-Orientalism couches confrontations, hesitations, and doubts in very public, social terms of dialog, conference and debate, and relies on the negotiation of difference. But self-Orientalism is considered by many critics to be as equally disparaging as Said's Orientalism when used by diverse oriental groups to enhance their "Orientalness" through difference (Miller 1982) or their marketable "Oriental identities" for Western consumption (Yan/Santos 2009). Furthermore, so invasive is this deception that it produces a self-fulfilling prophecy, an image of the East created in the East but influenced by Western perceptions. But I embrace self-Orientalism over 'latent' or 'new' Orientalism, to explore the notion of agency in the dialectic between self and Other. I view it as a valuable strategy to challenge meaning through a negotiation of relationships in varying public and private power domains because, in effect, one elects to self-Orientalize through critical self-reflection. Its goal is to remain open to ways of knowing and cultural practices enhanced by contact with the Other and parallel forms of knowledge. Because the colonial experiment ends in Spanish America with an attempt to identify the new countries with the future rather than, as in other colonial experiments, with an au-

tochthonous past (Alonso 1998: 11), and because Latin American modernity arises from pre-modern traditions and memories and transforms them in the process (Rowe/Schelling 1991: 3), the center is displaced, shifting from the reductive search for national identity to the more capacious and illusive goal of social justice.

In effect, self-Orientalism could be considered a contestatory, dialogic model that unpacks unique cultural practices, philosophical dogma and social trends. This is a strategy to engage those cultural hitches found in contact zones, in those extremely uneven, asymmetrical relationships of power that imply a copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures (Pratt 1992); it provides a way out of intellectual smugness and isolation through the forces of vigorous improvisation.

Bhabha underscores Said's attending late in life to those unsettled states of transition, those hybrid moments of exile and immigration – "the slow question of articulation and affiliation 'what to connect with, how and how not?'" (Bhabha 2005: 13) – exploring agency through the lens of self-reflection. But as we cannot assume agency to be everywhere, it is valuable to comprehend how self-Orientalism makes these cultural spaces and moments pursuable, desirable, and actionable on the personal, colonial, national or global levels.

My theory of self-Orientalism is not, primarily, a marker of difference or essentialisms, but is a reflection of the self in light of the Other. The Other has been constituted periodically and comparatively through anthropological, feminist, race, postcolonial and poststructural studies, Lacan's theory of the Other's gaze, and Octavio Paz's conceptualization of the dialectic of opposition and fusion, which he argues to be evident in all civilizations at all times (Paz 1978: 48, 1979: 109*)*. I embrace self-Orientalism as a figure rooted in a conceptualization of Hispanic Orientalism where reason and spirituality coexist. Aihwa Ong proposes one critical analysis that connects self-Orientalization to the inflecting of Asian voices with Orientalist essentialisms, which is the self-fulfilling prophecy referenced above, but her more compelling view of self-Orientalization is the recognition of agency to maneuver and manipulate meanings within specific power domains (Ong 1999: 81). Self-Orientalism challenges meaning through a negotiation of relationships in varying public and private power domains because, in effect, one elects to self-Orientalize through critical self-reflection. Its goal is to remain open to ways of knowing and cultural practices enhanced by contact with the Other, in order that the Other may

speak, convince, persuade, reflect, resist, debate, mystify and demystify through the engagement of parallel forms of knowledge.

Similar to the responses of popular culture, the practice of self-Orientalism thrives during periods of crisis, be they cultural, economic or political. Just as Paul Rabinow (1986) argues that cosmopolitanism reinforces the macro-interdependencies and inescapabilities of places, characters, historical trajectories and fates, I would suggest that self-Orientalism relies on the macro-interdependencies of place, character, etc. because they are pieces of a dialog that are dependent on and complement each other even as their meaning is being manipulated. Self-Orientalism inscribes highly innovative and subtle ways everyday acts of resistance might be assumed in light of uncanny models of tolerance and co-existence, or the threat of imperialism and more recently, capitalism. It signals the agency of the Other predominantly in irregular power relations because it frames those contestatory spaces and moments from which to speak, speak back, reject, remain silent, reconsider, and readjust cultural capital.

Self-Orientalism, Exile and Severo Sarduy

Novelist Severo Sarduy's native Cuba is a multicultural center of interconnectedness that blends African, Chinese and Spanish traditions. Sarduy's Orientalism combines his interest since childhood in Buddhism and theosophy, his visit to Sarnath, where the historic Buddha is said to have delivered his fundamental speech, and his interrogation of rhetorical concepts of parody, simulation and anamorphosis in post-structuralist narrative. Breaking with Western linguistic norms of representation in a South-South, Cuban-post-GPS Asia by way of India, Sarduy mines neobaroque images to reimagine and undermine reality through cultural displacement. In his novels *Cobra* (1972) and *Maitreya* (1978) Sarduy privileges parallel forms of knowledge, rejecting a Western mapping of India for a model built on slippages and traces of meaning, his vision of himself as always dual, his "oriente de pacotilla" as he calls it and his understanding of meaning as textures that coexist on the same surface (Kushigian 1984: 15, 18; Rodríguez Monegal 1970: 319, 321). This is the East liberated from the salon or museum to be lived in bazaars and busy streets. Self-Orientalism for Sarduy is a strategy to pursue social and philosophic change by engag-

ing his desire for cultural change through parody, simulation, kitsch, and mimicry.[3] Given agency to manipulate meaning, Sarduy layers potential over his and the Other's silences, political conflicts and displacements, to end *Maitreya* in exile "para demostrar la impermanencia y vacuidad de todo" (Sarduy 1978: 187).

Maitreya is Sanskrit for the future Buddha, who will appear on earth, achieve complete enlightenment and teach the pure dharma, or universal law of nature. The novel is a continuation of the open-ended South-South dialog begun in Sarduy's third novel, *Cobra* (1972). With *Cobra* Sarduy attempts to explore the subconscious of the typical Spanish-American narrative of identity, investigating transgression in its sexual, scientific and social aspects in two parallel but interwoven narratives. Sarduy's self-Orientalist treatment of transvestism, kitsch, and scientific knowledge from competing traditions is seamless, given that parallel systems of knowledge, hence traditions, are enacted from *within* the narrative. Sarduy begins with the liberating notion that everything is metaphor, metonymy and displacement, and most specifically, cultural displacement (Kushigian 1984: 19). He problematizes the question of Western authority over truth and scientific knowledge in his novel *Cobra* through Pup, Sirius's astrophysical double. Pup becomes Cobra's dwarf double in the novel, complete with corresponding mathematical formulas ($\text{Cobra} = \text{Pup}^2$ or $\text{Pup} = \sqrt{\text{Cobra}}$) collapsing the space between signifier and signified, neither representing nor manipulating the missing signifier because, as Peter Hallward demonstrates,

> Sarduy writes the *literalisation* of an original metaphor, rather than a figuration of a supposedly literal or denotative origin. Everything is metaphor, as even "science doesn't use a literal, denotative, dry language, but a language of figures, imagined, weaved of metaphors" white dwarves, red giants, red shift, light fatigue, black holes, and so on. And what a novel like *Cobra* does is "take the metaphors of scientific discourse […] and make them literal. Of each scientific metaphor it makes a character, that is, it creates an absurd universe parallel to the supposedly real universe." […] Sarduy's goal is to sweep up both figured exception and norm in a single expression, a single depravation of ordinary demonstrative language. (Hallward 2001: 303)

3 Mimicry poses a threat, Homi Bhabha concludes, to both "normalized" knowledge and disciplinary powers (1984: 126).

Sarduy wrests exception and norm from an oppositional structure and creates a model of self-Orientalist expression, where he writes ambivalences and magnifies hitches in their interconnected universes.

The act of making the metaphor of science or sexuality literal, for example, requires first disrupting authority, reducing the relationship to equal terms, and then questioning "what it means to have come into existence, to have left traces, […] to have appeared when and where they did" (Foucault 1972: 109). This is why Sarduy can claim as he does in our interview (Kushigian 1984) that his impression of Orientalism is both 'choteo', the disruptive Cuban brand of humor, *and* 'Koan', the Tantric Buddhist exercise that dissolves in negation; at once Indian kitsch *and* sacred philosophy because opposites no longer exist in binary contradiction, given that the figure has been interrupted. By questioning what it means for these tropes to fuse into one social exchange, and what traces each leaves on the other and the reader, Sarduy challenges their inviolability as isolated events. In effect, the unhinging of meaning during periods of cultural crisis urges Sarduy to transform the process of writing, a process he regards as a force that "demythologizes, corrupts, mines, cracks the foundation of any regime" (quoted in Franco 1976-1977: 11). He demonstrates that meaning is always provisional and tentative (Pellón 1983) and, consequently, laughter and parody are included in the original discourse of his narrative. As a self-Orientalist, Sarduy annuls the distance between meta-language and language-object, moving from foundational equations of equality between words and their identity with the non-verbal, to an emphasis on, as he would signal in homage to Lezama Lima, the "dialogical presence" of the page. In this manner, he points toward the "unfurling of parallel knowledge" (Sarduy 1969: 63). Sarduy's work disavows authority on the one hand yet in an antithetical gesture recognizes and menaces it repeatedly (both against the rules but within them with a "same but different" or "a mí, plin" attitude).

In *Maitreya*, Sarduy anticipates transnational movements that explore race, disease, poverty, invasion, migration, sexuality, and hybridities, through a process of self-Orientalization. That is, by electing to reduce the double figure, the metaphor, or parallel Western and Eastern systems of knowledge to one, he reconfigures ordinary language with an entirely new system of meaning. Purposefully, by returning after structuralism to a renewed recovery of Cubanness buried but evident in most of his other works, Sarduy diverts the reader by way of a South-South route through

China, Tibet, Ceylon, India and Miami. His goal is to recoup indirectly the obverse of American utopia, sought previously by generations of Latin American writers, and imagine instead a place of symbols invested with sacred meaning but devoid of the Romantic tradition's ironic distance (González Echevarría 1987: 12, 56). Beginning in Tibet in anticipation of the death and rebirth of the legendary Buddha Maitreya, the novel *Maitreya* picks up where *Cobra* leaves off, on the border between India and Tibet. It weaves sorrow, fear, confusion, and displacement as much historically, with the gunshots from the Chinese invasion in 1950, as philosophically, in the loss and displacement of the Master into the new figure of the Instructor.

Maitreya is an alternative reading that parodies and inverts *Cobra* by reversing the direction of flight to an East-West migratory route towards Cuba and the United States. The flow of spaces in the novel leads to India and the discovery of the reincarnated Maitreya, a small boy living with the Leng sisters, who is declared the Instructor. When the burden of his status becomes too much for him, however, they escape to Colombo where he eventually abandons his spiritual mission and flees with Iluminada, the Leng sisters' niece, to Cuba. While in Matanzas, Cuba, he increasingly refuses to participate in the spiritual exercises of the Koan, and relies more heavily on choteo. Ultimately, the Instructor remains unaffected by everything, slows his breathing to a standstill and dies, celebrated in a funeral rite that echoes the one performed for the Master in Tibet in the first part of the novel.

The second part of *Maitreya* is divided into four sections whose titles alternate between "El Puño, I y II" and "El Doble, I y II". The doubling and expansion continues when the site of exile is further displaced with the birth of "Las Tremendas", the twin sisters born in Sagua la Grande, who, after passing through their first menstrual cycle, lose their miraculous healing powers and take up with Luis Leng, son of Iluminada and El Dulce, experiment with singing and performing on stage, and eventually move to Miami. From Miami, La Tremenda and La Divina, accompanied by Luis Leng and a dwarf, move to New York, where Leng opens a restaurant and the Leng sisters reappear as the witches, Las Tétricas, who attempt to cause La Tremenda to lose her voice. One evening while drugged, La Tremenda roller-skates down a New York City street toward the fountain at Washington Square, where she meets and falls in love with an Iranian chauffeur and through cultural displacement (read renewed exile), they end up with the dwarf in the Middle East. In Iran they open a massage parlor that specializes in sadomasochistic practices for sheiks, but the dwarf is accused

of abusive practices and they are taken prisoner and forced into exile once again. After drinking a potion, La Tremenda and the dwarf are able to see the name of a prophet and in ritual fashion she and the Iranian chauffer make love. A month later her fetus and the dwarf die and are buried together, while La Tremenda appears in Afghanistan, only to renounce a local cult that exalts her and head toward the South.

With a uniquely Cuban sense of humor and environmentally Indian sacred sense of respect for all forms of life, Sarduy signals in this self-reflection the ruptures, breaks, hesitations, and discontinuities of those confronted with consequences that alter the course of lives, narrative logic, and history. Sarduy layers the choteo with Koan and vice versa, weaving together their hybrid figures that become mutually dependent. He produces a dialogic social exchange whose rhetoric binds participants through their reactions to its shocking and excessive nature. The choteo is a unique form of Cuban humor whose social matrix conceals unexpected references to sociological complexities wrapped in bawdy jokes, uncouth noises, scatological references, etc. As a formula of disrespect, it subverts authority and levels hierarchies by either completely denying distinctions of class, culture or wealth, or demonstrating select contempt for certain kinds of authority (Pérez Firmat 1984). In the primary study on choteo, Jorge Mañach describes the exchange as evasive and fluid (Mañach 1940: 13) because it embodies a loosening of standards, a parody and inversion of social, religious and political hierarchies. As such, it appeals to vulgar, crass, street language and absurd images and noises to shock and produce an effect on the Other. Valued because of their similar interactive properties, both Koan and choteo depend upon the exchange between speaker and addressee as everyday acts of resistance. The Koan, a Zen Buddhist exercise, is a dialogic exchange that is rooted, according to Sarduy, in the absurd, in the ability to reduce all terms to vacuity. Sarduy details the Koan exercise:

> El maestro propone una pregunta, siempre excesiva en su banalidad o su arrogancia: "¿Qué cara tenías antes de nacer? ¿Qué es un búcaro? ¿Qué haces si encuentras al Buda en tu camino?" Los alumnos responden, aceptan los términos de la interrogación, sus presupuestos lógicos. No el que está en el camino de la "budeidad": su respuesta, y el súbito vacío que crea, la brutal exención del sentido, desdicen y anulan los términos mismos del planteo, o los remiten, como el resto de la realidad, a su "naturaleza" de pantalla y simulacro, de impermanencia e ilusión. Un grito. Romper el búcaro de una patada. Matar al Buda. Lo más absurdo. Sin que ni siquiera el absurdo pueda fijarse en método. La pregunta y el interrogador quedan remitidos a la misma vacuidad: al mismo silencio. (Sarduy 1982: 106)

One example that explores how Sarduy privileges self-Orientalism as a contestatory, dialogic strategy is found in a scene in Ceylon in his novel *Maitreya.* Here he unpacks Cuban philosophic dogma and cultural practices as well as Buddhist philosophy by interweaving them, annulling the distance between them, and making everything metaphor and all metaphor literal. Their location in exile, far from the sanctioned site of "origin", displaces the metaphor culturally from the setting and *ethos* of Latin America and the philosophic Buddhist institutions of India. Exile affords Sarduy the dialogic space to liberate metaphor, negotiate meaning and confront silences in the text. In this mythical exile of cultural crisis the playing field is level. Everyday acts of resistance in the Koan and choteo are understood as completely viable social formulas of exchange designed to upset hierarchies and demonstrate hitches in the absolute, fixed nature of systems of knowledge and power. A productive example of the fusing of Koan and choteo is found in the chapter "La Isla":

> Un poco más alto en el promontorio, albañiles negros, en trusa y con grandes turbantes morados, atareados y sudorosos, se aprestaban a la conclusión del templo. […] Cantando más fuerte volvían a la faena. Se rascaban el sexo y se lo acomodaban constantemente, como si la trusa lo apretara en exceso, riéndose.
>
> –¿De dónde venimos –preguntó el más joven de los peones mientras nivelaba un ladrillo–, cuándo tuvo origen el universo?
>
> –¡Vamos, hombre! –respondió–. Si a un guerrero le entierran una flecha envenenada en la planta del pie, ¿debe de buscar quién la tiró, de dónde viene, qué curare le pusieron, o tratar de sacársela en seguida? (Sarduy 1978: 48-49)

This *mise en scène* is a carefully constructed cultural portrait, which, like many Orientalist paintings, fuses cultural cliché (temples, turbans, black laborers) with vivid color (black, brick, purple) and purpose (working to create a building for religious practice).

The blending of race and sexuality with laughter and song is the first indication of a hybrid culture in exile that is not site specific. This could be a scene of exile set in a variety of geographic locations or it could be in the global, non-place of language. It is a text that is metonymic and displaces itself constantly, because Sarduy finds it inconceivable to practice the Aristotelian unities of time, place and action. This negotiation of exile encourages the unsettling of hierarchies and the probing of cultural hitches when the startling philosophic question of transcendental weight, "¿de dónde

venimos?" mixes with commentary on race, sexuality, and warrior cultures, and reduces the act to a void, to nothingness. In this formula for social interaction the response shocks; its comeback levels philosophic inquiry and mockingly rejects spirituality for logic. The contact zone of asymmetrical relationships of power based on race, age, religious beliefs and experience conflates India with Cuba by way of Ceylon, as a movement away from fixed, closed images and a way out of intellectual smugness.

The characters of the novel are distinguished by the dissolution of traditional protagonists, which creates a space for them to exist always in exile, at the edges of a historical explosion (Santos 2004: 166; González Echevarría 1987: 188), or rather as eager risk takers during flashes of cultural crisis: the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese, the forced exile of the Dalai Lama and his followers, the Chinese Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, the Iranian Revolution and subsequent expulsion of the Shah, Sri Lankan Independence, the expansion of Islam, not to mention the rise of oil dollars, potentates from Oman, and the proximity of Hittite death masks to President Kennedy's portrait and Charles Atlas's weights. Sensing that his entire life was spent in exile in the West (Ríos 1982: 21), Sarduy writes exile through the agency of self-Orientalism, which reinforces the autonomy of language from place and politics. Exile is not a means to an end but the end in itself: floating, rich in potential derived from melancholia and arrival, and asymmetrical with respect to relationships of power. Exile engages the reader because, having eliminated ironic distance, it also eliminates transcendental knowledge, and aspires as a text to reach Nirvana, which is the void or the complete excision of desire for something more or something else.[4]

The incarnation of Maitreya engages those hitches, hesitations and movements between cultures that are the sites of cultural production. Curiously, the possibility Sarduy claims in the erosion, destruction and disempowering of ideologies, knowledge and rival privileges (Rivero 1986, Rivero-Potter 1998, Méndez Ródenas 1983, Prieto 1998), both centers and upends the East and Buddhism as the central figures against or upon which the novel will be constructed. At times Sarduy appeals to the resemblance and menace of that familiar relationship, which is at once the

4 Similarly, self-Orientalist exile is a liberating metaphor in Juan Goytisolo's *Reivindicación del Conde Don Julián* (1970), which constitutes a plea for national psychoanalysis. The narrator's dream from Tangier for a new invasion of Spain, to destroy the powerful Spanish institutions and symbols on which post-Civil War Spain had been constructed (1981: 32-33) is fundamentally a desire to unsettle privileged Western supremacy.

same and the obverse of the mirrored image and the fusion of competing cultural systems and social exchanges:

> Los adeptos acudían al ashram carentes de instrucciones, pero viendo que, con subterfugios y evasivas, o tirándolos francamente a choteo, se negaba a elucidar lo que a sus ojos era esencial –origen y fin del universo, realidad de la reencarnación, existencia de un alma individual, etc.–, o quizás persiguiendo milagros anodinos, bendiciones, auspicios, burdas comunicaciones con los muertos, desviaban cada vez más del plano astral sus intercesiones, rebajadas a curanderíos, adivinanzas y horóscopos. (Sarduy 1978: 68)

Through a blending of the figures of the sacred and the "oriente de pacotilla," offering subterfuge and horoscopes when reincarnation and miracles are expected, Sarduy declares that there is no distinction that divides them, because the sacred and the erotic form the same dialectic, the same figure of parody (Kushigian 1984: 15; 1999: 1615).

Where self-Orientalism is supported by a South-South dialog, "¡Al sur, antes de que lleguen los nórdicos amostazados!" (Sarduy 1978: 21) is in the domain of spirituality that is lucidly explored by Partha Chatterjee. The space of spirituality, off-limits to colonial powers, becomes a 'modern' national culture that belongs solely to the new nation (read site of exile). It is here, in this liberating space of openness to the practice of one's dynamic spiritual culture through the expression of language, art, family, class and gender, that the freedom of imagination is ultimately realized and the East is the master of its own fate (Chatterjee 1993: 4-6; 120-121). Sarduy's aspirations to substitute those violent and torn images that defy hierarchies of knowledge with parodies, jokes, and myths reveal his perennial desire to recoup the self through his openness to the Other as dialogic partner. Perhaps Sarduy's goal is to refute the stubbornness of place, and to champion the pure impulse of linguistic, sexual or culinary desire. This self-Orientalist realm of space is a site of possibility, from doublings of meaning to ultimate vacuity and silence couched in the metaphor of exile.

Concluding Orientalisms

In essence, Said's Orientalism can be understood as a formula for grasping a nostalgic, exotic past. It is predicated on continual self-reference, on a

museum-like quality of otherness, there for display, perusal, and astonishment. Its self-referentiality makes it ever more alienating because it communicates a static, supine, dominated, managed and reproduced image. In effect, it is on display permanently, and for many, 'Orientalism' may only be conceived as the precise image robustly recreated and defended by Edward Said. What he produces is a conflicted work at odds at times with its own elegance and message, but brilliantly successful in creating a debate of transcendental importance for Eastern and Western experience.

Hispanic Orientalism, in contrast with the self-referential quality of Said's interpretation, is an alternative reading that seeks an open-ended relationship with the Other, one whose openness underscores the collaborative nature of the bond. It interrupts cultural hegemony and institutional hierarchies by providing a foundation for opening itself to renovative and critical debate (on tolerance, the Black Legend, and slavery, for example) that often reaches a global level. It provides the framework from within which to interpret creative cultural tensions and annul collusions of knowledge and power. Hispanic Orientalism evolves significantly during periods of cultural crisis, stressing those hitches, ambivalences, hesitations, doubts and uncertainties that demonstrate how people negotiate their lives and space through the lens of self-reflection. A greater sense of liberation is achieved with the Hispanic alliance because it lives Orientalism from within as a hybrid form that remains open to the potentiality of human intellect across traditions, cultural fusions and productive contaminations.

Self-Orientalism is the contestatory space carved out by Hispanic Orientalism, a platform for those everyday acts of resistance that upset power hierarchies through cultural displacements. As a dialogic model, it unpacks cultural practices as a way out of intellectual stagnancy and smugness. In Severo Sarduy's work, self-Orientalism pursues social and philosophic transformations through cultural change by relying on slippages and traces of meaning. For example, self-Orientalism in Sarduy's narrative displaces authority and problematizes the signs of cultural priority in his fusion of choteo and Koan exercises. Through them he anticipates transnational movements that explore race, immigration, exile, disease, poverty and sexuality, in a movement away from fixed, closed images to ever-evolving systems of parallel knowledge. Read as alternative narratives to Western supremacy, Sarduy's texts open the door for generations of writers and developing critical literary and cultural theorists to outstrip historical

context, place and creative fate as 'end-markers' and rely, instead, on a dynamic, collaborative relationship with the Other for their beginnings.

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